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Onomatopoeia in Abui

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Iconicity, imitation, and universality

- Onomatopoeia belongs among the family of iconic language devices whose iconicity is absolute, the onomatopoeia directly resembles its meaning (Tamariz et al. 2018).
- Imitative vocalisations (onomatopoeia, ideophones, etc.) belong in a larger set of imitative behaviours displayed by humans. “...*instead of trying to reproduce the referent sound as accurately as vocally possible, vocal imitations focus on a few important features, which depend on each particular sound category*” ... (Lemaitre et al. 2016:1).
- Cross-linguistically, onomatopoeic inventories show similar make-up due to the shared articulatory physiology, vocal configurations imitating non-speech sounds, and co-articulated consonants (Assaneo et al. 2011).

Onomatopoeia defined

- Onomatopoeia is understood as a **subclass of ideophones that imitates sounds** (cf. Dingemanse 2011:33).
- We are aware that some take the imitation in the narrow sense while others include any words bearing a sign of sound imitation (cf. Körtvélyessy 2020).

Integration of onomatopoeia in language

The integration of onomatopoeia into the language is constrained by the following factors:

Phonology: phonemic inventory and the phonotactics

Cultural semantics: degree of elaboration of various domains, e.g. pervasive use of *onomatopoeia in bird names* in Aguaruna and Huambisa, two Jivaroan languages of Peru (cf. Berlin and O'Neill 1981); or the '**auditory hallucinations**' of Orang Sakai in Sumatra describing various spirits (cf. Porath 2008) illustrating the cross-modal association between auditory, visual and abstract categories

Morphosyntax: (inclusion of onomatopoeic roots into the grammatical system – cf. Körtvélyessy 2020).

In this paper we address the above three properties of onomatopoeia in Abui, a Papuan language of Eastern Indonesia.



Morphological profile

- Head-marking language
- Consistently verb-final
- Highly agglutinative verbal morphology
- **Extensive verbal morphology:**
Affixation, Root mutation, Reduplication, Incorporation
- Elaborate object agreement but **no** subject agreement
- Free and bound verbal roots
- Verb serialisation

- (1) Bui kaai **ha-wik**.
name dog 3.I-carry.IPFV
'Bui is carrying her dog in her arms.'
- (2) A-táng do mi **he-wik**, **hee-wik-e!**
2SG.INAL-hand PROX take 3.II-carry.IPFV 3.BEN-carry.IPFV-PROG
'Carry it in your hands, carry it for him!'
- (3) Ata di he-daweng **he-da-minang-di**.
name 3.AGT 3.AL-medicine 3.II-3.REFL.I-remember-INCH
'Ata remembered his medicine.'
- (4) Deri di ama **hee-l=he-fikang**
name 3.AGT person 3.BEN-GIVE=3.II-respect.IPFV
'Deri respects people'
- (5) kaai de-tamai dieng-pe **lang-mara~mara**
dog 3.REFL.II-keep.doing.IPFV kitchen ALL.MD-RED~go.up.IPFV
'The dog is entering kitchen all the time.'
- (6) tung-ai loohu **ming-nada-sama**
year-root be.long APPL-1SG.COM=be.with
'may I have a long life!' (lit. 'may long years be with me!')

Onomatopoeia in Abui - native label

- Onomatopoeia in Abui forms a salient class with a native label.

nala

something

‘onomatopoeia’

ha-moi

3.poss-voice

he-tanga

3.poss-speech

bika

seed

- As we will see, the native label is highly suggestive of the onomatopoeic inventory by invoking the concepts of ‘voice’ and ‘speech’.

Phonology - high rate of (imitative) reduplication

- Abui onomatopoeia is characterised by a high rate of reduplication (otherwise rare in Abui and restricted to the verb to mark certain aspectual categories).
- The reduplication is usually partial and imitative (i.e. the vowel changes or lengthens).
- Frequent velar codas: **ŋ, k, q**
- Frequent trill **r**
- Occasional **CC** clusters (not allowed in lexical words)
- Frequent pattern CVC-CV:C (but less common with animal vocalization)

Cultural semantics

The largest subset is associated with the **human body** and **human actions (incl. vocalizations)** followed by onomatopoeia describing **animal sounds, nature, or elements.**

Cultural semantics - Human vocalisations

Human vocalisations

<i>eeng</i>	'sound of crying'
<i>eng</i>	'stutter (hyperventilating)'
<i>hak-hak</i>	'sound made during war dance, sounds like the impact of a blade'
<i>hing-haang</i>	'sound of sighing'
<i>in ~ in-in</i>	'sound of physical discomfort, preceding the loss of consciousness'
<i>suoi</i>	'sound of setting dogs to pursue a hunted prey or chase chickens'

Cultural semantics - Human speech

Human speech

<i>ing-aang</i>	'sound of an argument'
<i>dung-daang</i>	'sound of mumbling'
<i>hini-haan</i>	'sound of irritating speech'
<i>hooi</i>	'sound of calling each other'
<i>unung-anang</i>	'sound of chitchat'
<i>ying-yaang</i>	'sound of passing voices'

Cultural semantics - Sounds by human body

Sounds from inside the human body

<i>ading-ading</i>	‘sound of heartbeat (e.g., of being afraid)’
<i>baq-baq</i>	‘sound of jaw when eating’
<i>boq-baq</i>	‘sound of large breasts (female), buttocks, or belly (humorous)’
<i>diq-daq</i>	‘sound of small female breasts’
<i>diq-diq</i>	‘the sound of blood inside one’s head with quick heartbeat’
<i>kudoq-kudoq</i>	‘sound of drinking in the throat’
<i>kutung-kataak</i>	‘sound of eating seeds or like grinder grinding seeds’

Cultural semantics - Sounds by human body

Human movement and actions

<i>bruung</i>	'sound of jumping into water'
<i>ding-duung</i>	'sound of heavier stomps'
<i>ting-tuung</i>	'sound of light stomps'
<i>sobak</i>	'sound of slipping'
<i>puuk-puuk</i>	'sound of blowing (blowing fire)'

Cultural semantics - Animal vocalisations

<i>krik-krik</i>	‘sound of a cricket, grasshopper or a frog’
<i>kiyeek</i>	‘sound of a rooster crowing’
<i>pakeeq</i>	‘sound of a chicken cackling’
<i>kutuk-kutuk</i>	‘sound of a chicken squawking’
<i>kikuk</i>	‘sound of a rat squeaking’
<i>mee</i>	‘sound of a goat or deer bleating’
<i>waa</i>	‘sound of a cat meowing’
<i>kawee</i>	‘sound of a pig’
<i>awoo</i>	‘sound of a dog howling’
<i>mung</i>	‘sound of buzzing (insects)’

Cultural semantics: Inanimate sound emitters

Sounds produced by inanimate entities are less likely to be imitated. Instead, the producer is cast as the subject of the verb *damoida* 'make sound', e.g. *adii damoida* 'the sky thunders (lit. makes sound)'

Liquids

sor-sor

'sound of falling urine or water'

ter-ter

'sound of urinating (women)'

kuluk-kuluk

'sound of boiling liquid'

brong ~ burong

'sound of splashing water'

tidaaq

'dripping sound'

Explosions

ter-ter

'the sound of gun/firearm'

katak-katak

'sound of cracking, e.g. popped corn, twig'

Cultural semantics: Inanimate sound emitters

Sounds produced by inanimate entities are less likely to be imitated. Instead, the producer is cast as the subject of the verb *damoida* 'make sound'.

Falling objects	<i>king-koong</i>	'sound of a light wood falling in jungle/river'
	<i>kireeq</i>	'sound of tearing or breaking'
	<i>kling-klang</i>	'sound of bamboo stalks hitting each other'
	<i>paq</i>	'sound of cracking (egg)'
	<i>ring-roong</i>	'sound of falling metal object'

Cultural semantics: Inanimate sound emitters

Objects being hit

pak~paq 'cracking sound, e.g., an egg falls down and breaks'

paaq 'hitting or clapping sound'

reng 'sound of hitting a metal object'

tibuk 'sound of stabbing or piercing'

Music instruments

dung-dang 'high/massive sound of music'

boong-boong 'sound of bigger gong of instrument'

keeng-keeng 'sound of small gong of instrument'

kiling-kiling 'sound of small metal bells'

Cultural semantics - Auditory hallucinations

king-kuung 'sound made by spirits or ghosts'

ying-yaang 'idem., variant'

ying-yuung 'idem., variant'

Characteristic speech of strange creatures: nasality as a characterisation of a shapeshifter in *Halifi Loohu* tale. There are no nasal vowels in Abui but the *angmona* (lit. dead body) speaks with a lisp and consistently nasal. The speech is a characteristic feature.

Talking birds: in some stories people change into birds and birds talk. In the story *Poying Padalehi* a magic pigeon adopts a maltreated child. it answers **mm, mm, mm** at first, but later starts using Abui.

Cultural semantics - auditory hallucinations

Pigeon Padalehi flew down from the tree and hit the legs and hands of the boy. He kept hitting them until they became soft. Then he pulled out some feathers from his wings and stabbed those into the boy's armpit.

"Yes, sure! But what if I can't do it?"

"Not possible!
Of course you can do it!"

Having done this he said:

"Watch my boy, in whatever way I jump,
you must jump like that too!"



Morphosyntax: Speech verbs

In discourse, most onomatopoeic roots are treated as direct speech quotes and marked with quotatives or speech verbs.

Na ruwol bira ong-ha-yei yo 'pak' baa-i
1sg.agt chicken egg CAUS-3.I-fall.IPFV MD.AD ONOM say-PFV

'I dropped something and it went "pak".' (like an egg cracking) [EVY.1572]

The inanimate sound onomatopoeia can be used creatively, for example using one for an object to refer to a sudden death of someone.

'paaq' baa-i=ba laaq-e!'
ONOM say-PFV=SIM leave-PROG

'he just went "paaq" and died' (said of a young person who died suddenly)

Morphosyntax: Realis and quotative marking

Another way to mark the onomatopoeia is the realis marker *mai* that attaches also after the onomatopoeia.

ruui *da-moi-di=ba* *kiikuk=mai.*

raat 3REFL.I-voice-INCH=SIM ONOM=**REAL**

‘the rat squeaked “kiikuk”’

ama *nuku* *ding-duung=ba* *wee-i*

person one ONOM=**QUOT** leave-PFV

‘somebody stomped off like “thump-thump”’

Morphosyntax: ONOM in derivation

Through a regular derivation path, the many onomatopoeic roots may combine with the inceptive suffix (*-da~-na~-ra*) to denote the event producing the sound described by the onomatopoeia.

ONOM	>	PREDICATE
<i>kuluk-kuluk</i>	>	<i>ya kuluk-kuluk-da</i> 'water is boiling/bubbling'
<i>borong-borong</i>	>	<i>waal borong-boronra</i> 'water is splashing'
<i>tidaaq</i>	>	<i>anui tidaaq-da</i> 'the rain drops are dripping'
<i>waa</i>	>	<i>waanra</i> 'to meow (of a cat or civet)'
<i>krik-krik</i>	>	<i>krik-krikna</i> 'to chirp (of a cricket, grasshopper, frog)'
<i>ehe-ehe</i>	>	<i>ehei-ehei-da</i> 'to laugh mockingly, ridicule s.o.'
<i>mung</i>	>	<i>mungra</i> 'to buzz (of insects)'

Morphosyntax: Derived animal sound verbs

Some onomatopoeias expressing animal vocalisations have verbal counterparts that are derived by adding the light verb *-l* 'give'.

ONOM	>	PREDICATE
<i>mee</i>	>	<i>mee-l</i> 'to bleat (of a goat or deer)'
<i>kawee</i>	>	<i>kawee-l</i> 'to squeal (of a pig)'
<i>awoo</i>	>	<i>awoo-l</i> 'to howl (of dogs)'

Morphosyntax: General sound verbs

For many inanimate entities where there may be cross-linguistically a common onomatopoeia Abui does only use the verbs *damoida* 'make sound' and *dameengra* 'make a humming sound' with the respective entity as its subject.

ENTITY	>	PREDICATE	
<i>thunder</i>	>	<i>adii da-moi-da</i>	'the thunder is heard'
<i>car</i>	>	<i>oto da-moi-da</i>	'the car is heard'
<i>car engine</i>	>	<i>oto hemusing da-meeng-ra</i>	'the car engine is running'

Morphosyntax: Blurred boundary with ideophones

Some of the onomatopoeia associated with the human body become the base to derive emotional terms which describe the emotion through its bodily appraisal. In such use, the onomatopoeiaic base shifts to an ideophone.

diq-diq > *diq-diq-da* 'be stressed, be nervous'

te-pikaai *kul* *he-diq-diq-da* *yoo, maama!*

Distr.al-head MOD 3.II-ONOM-INCP MD.AD. father

'that gives us headache, stress, you know!'

Summary

- Abui onomatopoeia are overwhelmingly relying on reduplication (full or partial, sometimes imitative). There is a preference for velar and uvular codas.
- Abui onomatopoeia is fairly restricted and mainly expresses with human and animal vocalisations.
- Some inanimate sounds can also be expressed with onomatopoeia but their range is fairly restricted.
- In addition, some onomatopoeias refer to ‘auditory hallucinations’ associated with the Abui traditional spirituality and lore.
- Onomatopoeic roots in discourse are marked with quotatives, speech verbs or realis markers and may enter derivations with aspectual suffixes and light verbs.
- Use of onomatopoeia is a stylistic feature associated with skilled story-tellers, eloquence, ability to entertain and humour.

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